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ABSTRACT

This study examined the effects of caregiver stability on children's behavior in day care centers during a period of caregiver turnover. A total of 25 children, ages 2-5 years, in 7 day care centers who encountered caregiver turnover participated in the study. Baseline and turnover observations were conducted and scored, and correlated with demographic and family variables. Results showed no main effects of the turnover event on children's behavior. However, the findings suggested that temperamentally persistent, less emotional children, who spent more time in care, who had sensitive, responsive, and nonrestrictive caregivers, and who came from less disorganized home environments with more highly educated parents showed better adaptation and functioning during caregiver turnover in day care than their peers. The results also suggested that girls adapted more easily than boys. The findings underscore the link between home and day care contexts and how the characteristics of the home ecology bear on children's adaptation to day care. (MDM)

Individual and Contextual Predictors of Children's Behavior in Daycare During Caregiver Turnover Episodes*

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Abstract

It was hypothesized that caregiver turnover in daycare would affect children's behavior and affect. It was further hypothesized that individual differences in children's behavior during turnover episodes would be predicted by child, caregiver, interaction, home, and center characteristics. Twenty-five children (13 females) in 7 daycare centers were observed during daily activities and again during spontaneously occurring episodes of caregiver turnover. Data on the children and their caregivers' characteristics, as well as on the children's parents and on the home and daycare environments were obtained through questionnaires and interviews with center directors, caregivers, and parents. Results revealed no main effects of the turnover event on children's behavior. However, temperamentally persistent children, who entered care early and spent more time in care, who had nonrestrictive caregivers, and who came from more organized home environments showed higher levels of functioning during turnover, particularly in terms of positive caregiver-child and peer contact and higher levels of positive affect and exploration. Boys explored less and showed less positive affect during turnover than did girls.

Introduction

Caregiver stability, as measured by rate of caregiver turnover, has been identified as one of the main structural features of quality in day care. Research has shown that high turnover rates are correlated with lower quality environments for children in day care. While the general adverse effects of high turnover rates have been documented, virtually no data exist regarding children's behavior during the turnover event itself. Research has shown that separation from attachment figures can give rise to numerous behaviors suggesting distress, including reduced exploration, constructive play and positive affect, and an increase in anxiety, anger, fussiness, crying, and emotional detachment. A related line of research has focused on individual differences in children's coping responses in reaction to stress and change. Individual differences in children's coping have been found to correlate with both individual characteristics and contextual variables. In the present study, the effects of turnover episodes were hypothesized to manifest themselves in the form of increased defiance and conflict, reduced social play and exploration, and increased negative affect. Individual children's reaction to turnover in this study was expected to be predicted by both environmental and individual characteristics.

Method

Participants

Out of a sample of 58 children (ages 2-5) observed in 9 day care centers as part of a larger study, 25 children (13 females) in 7 centers encountered caregiver turnover and were thus selected for this study (see Table 1 for center and child characteristics). All participating children were in day care for at least one month and were enrolled for at least 20 hours per week. Sixteen primary caregivers were observed. On average, caregivers had over 4 years experience in the field and had been in their current center for 1 year. All but one of the caregivers observed had at least some college experience.

Baseline and Turnover Observations

Turnover occurs when a primary caregiver leaves permanently and another takes over. For each child prior to turnover, 3 baseline observations (30 minutes each) were conducted across

several weeks. Three turnover observations were carried out during a period of time from one week before to one week after the turnover event. Child and caregiver observational variables assessed both during baseline and turnover observations are shown in table 2. The mean inter-observer correlation for the observational variables was .76

Instruments

Caregivers completed the Temperament Assessment Battery for Children (TABC). The TABC assessed child emotionality, sociability, and persistence. Participating parents completed the CHAOS questionnaire, a 15-item parental report measure of levels of disorganization in the home. Data on parental education, age, and marital status were collected using a parent questionnaire. The Infant Toddler Environmental Rating Scale (ITERS), was used to assess the child care environment and adequacy of the facilities.

Results

For the child outcome variables, the clusters of variables emerging from a principle component analysis (verimax rotation) analysis, did not fit a coherent conceptual pattern. Thus, it was decided that the child outcome variables would be further analyzed individually. For the caregiver-child interaction variables, inspection of the scree plots revealed three conceptually coherent factors: factor 1--"sensitive caregiving" (object teaching, caregiver affect, caregiver sensitivity); factor 2--"caregiver nonresponsivity" (response to verbalization, non-response to bid); factor 3--"caregiver nonrestrictiveness" (object restriction, social restriction, caregiver affect). Principle components analysis on the center variables revealed one conceptually coherent center factor: "good quality" (ITERS, staff turnover, center size, adult/child ratio).

To answer the question about the main effect of turnover on children's behavior, an Hotelling T^2 test was conducted on the baseline versus turnover scores. The results were non-significant ($T^2 = 18.05$, $F(13,35) = 1.03$, NS). In the second stage of the analysis, partial correlations were used to explore the unique contribution of child, caregiver, interaction, home and center variables in predicting individual differences in children's reactivity to turnover. This was

achieved by correlating predictors with turnover outcome scores after partialling out baseline outcome scores. Table 3 presents the complete list of significant partial correlations.

The following predictors were identified as important moderators of children's reaction to turnover of their primary caregiver.

I. Moderators that facilitated children's adjustment to caregiver turnover

A. More hours per week in daycare.

B. Gender. Females adjusted more easily than males.

C. Temperament. Children high on persistence and low on emotionality showed better adjustment.

D. More caregiver hours per week with child.

E. Caregiver-Child Interaction Predictors. Children who had more sensitive, more responsive, less restrictive caregivers adjusted better to caregiver turnover.

F. Higher parental education level.

II. Moderators that inhibited children's adjustment to turnover

A. More disorganized home environment.

B. More experienced caregiver.

C. Fathers older in age.

Conclusions

The results suggest that temperamentally persistent, less emotional children, who spent more time in care, who had sensitive, responsive and nonrestrictive caregivers, and who came from less disorganized home environments with more highly educated parents showed better adaptation and functioning during caregiver turnover in daycare. Not surprisingly, the present results show how caregiver-child interaction can influence how well a child adjusts to caregiver turnover. These findings also suggest that children who have more involvement in day care may become "experts" in the day care life and are able to more successfully navigate changes in that environment. Finally, the findings underscore the link between the home and day care contexts and how characteristics of the home ecology bear on children's adaptation in day care. Particularly

striking are the strong correlations between the CHAOS scores and children's exploration and activity during turnover. Future research may benefit from incorporating more comprehensive measurements of the home environment, to further elucidate the home-daycare mesosystem connection in the context of caregiver turnover.

Table 1

Center and child charactersitics.

Center Characteristics		
	Mean	Range
Group Size	14	9-20
Cg/Child Ratio	7/1	4-8
Number of Children	80	30-140
Number of Caregivers	14	6-26
ITERS	191	184-210

% Lisenced: 71

% For Profit: 42

Child Characteristics		
Age	3.8	2-5
Age of Entry	1.8	1-3
Hours per Week in care	39.4	20-50

Table 2.

Predictors and outcome variables.

Child Predictors	Child Outcome Measures
Time in Care	Play
Age	Activity
Age of Entry	Exploration
Temperament	Defiance
Gender	Bids to Caregiver
	Verbalizations
	Peer Conflict

Caregiver Demographic Predictors

Education

Experience

Time with Child

Caregiver Behavioral Predictors

Factor 1 (Sensitivity)

Factor 2 (Non responsiveness)

Factor 3 (Non restrictiveness)

Home Predictors

Environmental Organization

Parental Age

Parental Education

Marital Status

Daycare Predictor

Center Quality Factor

Table 3

Partial correlations between moderator and outcome variables.

	Outcome	Partial Correlation
Child predictors		
Ave. hrs. per week		
	Positive affect	.53*
	Social play	.55*
Gender (male)		
	Exploration	-.40*
	Positive affect	-.35*
Persistence		
	Positive affect	.44**
Emotionality		
	Positive affect	-.40*
Caregiver predictors		
Caregiver Experience		
	Defiance	.45**
Caregiver Education		
	Solitary play	.44*
Hours with Child per Week		
	Exploration	.51**
	Social play	.45*
Interaction predictors		
CG Factor 1 (sensitive teaching)		
	Defiance	-.36*
	Positive affect	.40*

CG Factor 2 (nonresponsiveness)		
	Activity	-.37*
CG Factor 3 (nonrestrictiveness)		
	Parallel play	-.44**
	Positive affect	.47**
	Solitary play	.44**
	Home predictors	
CHAOS		
	Exploration	-.80***
	Activity	-.73***
Mother's Education		
	Defiance	-.70***
Father's Age		
	Defiance	.56**
	Center predictor	
Center Factor (center quality)		
	Solitary play	.44**

*	$p < .1$
**	$p < .05$
***	$p < .01$

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